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Thesis

THEORIES ON HAMLET'S REASONS FOR DELAY

Submitted by

Gladys Elizabeth Heyl
(A. B., Radcliffe College, 1919)

In partial fulfilment of requirements for

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THEORIES ON HAMLET'S REASONS FOR DELAY

Introduction

The reasons for Hamlet's delay have been debated for the last one hundred and fifty years; indeed it would be difficult to find any one other topic in the field of literature, of so specific a nature, that is, relating to a single play and to a single point in that play, which has held so prominent a place in literary criticism. Many of the greatest critics in England, Germany, France, and other civilized countries have at one time or another expressed their views on the subject, views so widely divergent that it hardly seems possible their points of departure can be found in the same play.

The very progress of thought for more than a century can be traced in these theories, for most of the critics have colored their theories with the most prominent ideas of their times; and the nationality of the critic, too, has had its influence. Thus Goethe portrayed a sentimental hero; the later German critics gave him a philosophic turn of mind, and finally in our own age we have the Freudian version of the ever popular hero. Consequently, it will be seen that many of the theories must be bad anachronisms. The personality of the critic has also affected his thesis, and he unwittingly portrays himself in Hamlet. And thus Coleridge made Hamlet too reflective, it is often charged, because he himself had the same quality.

It will be noticed that few of the criticisms of Hamlet date as far back as the Elizabethan Age or the age immediately following it. Literary history seems to show that Shakespearean audiences took Hamlet at its face value. It was only later in the Romantic Age, when the play was studied more than it was witnessed on the stage, that the divergent theories began to arise.

Our own age, with its interest in historical research, scientific methods of investigations on subjects that are not purely scientific, and comparative

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The very progress of thought for more than a century can be traced in these theories, for most of the critics have colored their theories with the most prominent ideas of their times; and the nationality of the critic, too, has had its influence. Thus Goethe portrayed a sentimental hero; the father German critics gave him a philosophical turn of mind, and finally in our own day we have the French version of the ever popular hero. Consequently, it will be seen that many of the theories must be said anachronisms. The personality of the critic has also affected his theory, and he unwittingly portrays himself in Hamlet. And thus Coleridge made Hamlet too reflective, it is often claimed, because he himself had the same quality.

It will be noticed that few of the criticisms of Hamlet date as far back as the Elizabethan Age or the age immediately following it. Literary history seems to show that Shakespearean criticism took flight at the close of the sixteenth century in the humanistic age, when the play was studied more than it was witnessed on the stage, that the divergent theories began to arise. But even now, with its interest in historical research, scientific methods of investigation on subjects that are not purely scientific, and comparative

values in literature, has evolved a theory which may be termed the scientific or historical theory. If it be asked whether this theory, colored by the thought of its day, will not pass as others have done, it may be urged in its defense that its very method insures it from being but a passing phase in Hamlet criticism. It is not, like most previous theories, impressionistic. These theories err in having disregarded one or all of the following points; the history of human thought, the history of the evolution of literature, the principles of dramatic composition and dramatic values, and the difference between reality and art. The new theory is based on historic or literary fact, which, unless our present history of literature can be disproved, cannot change. As far as literary theory can be scientific, this theory is so. The method or procedure is that of the twentieth century; it is a premise of the theory that the subject matter can never be anything but Elizabethan.

If one class of theory on the subject of Hamlet's delay displaced the former in orderly fashion, without overlapping, there might be no reason for further debate on the question, but such is not the case. The psycho-analytic and the scientific theories are being published simultaneously. A very recent edition of Hamlet, J. Q. Adams's, published in 1929, still supports the subjective point of view. The question arises whether any editor can justifiably permit new students of Hamlet to remain in ignorance of such an important contribution to Shakespearean criticism as the historical theory. In 1922 Clutton-Brock published his Hamlet, a psychological theory, in spite of the fact that the historical criticism of Lewis, The Genesis of Hamlet, had been published in 1907, and that of E. E. Stoll, Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study, in 1919. The problem, then, is not yet a closed issue, and controversy is still almost as great as it was in Coleridge's day.

It has been commonly supposed that the reasons for delay are the most vital point in Hamlet, for it is the problem upon which most of the others

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It has been commonly supposed that the reasons for delay are the most vital points in Hamlet. Yet it is the problem upon which most of the others

seem based. And it is largely on this explanation of delay that critics base the artistic value of the whole play, a recent critic, T. S. Eliot, having maintained that since the solution of this problem is impossible, the whole play loses its artistic value.¹ It is the duty, then, of the historical critic to give a rational explanation of the problem of delay and to show that the play has artistic values which are quite independent of this one problem.

In order to examine the best known theories on Hamlet's delay, we may classify them in three groups: the subjective or internal difficulties theories, the external difficulties theories, and the scientific or historical theories.

Internal Difficulties Theories

Goethe's theory of Hamlet's delay is to be gleaned from remarks made here and there in Books IV and V of Wilhelm Meister. His criticism is very fragmentary, in view of the extensively developed and detailed theories advanced by most of the later writers on the same subject. His whole theory can really be summed up in two oft quoted sentences. The first is as follows: "To me it is clear that Shakespeare meant, in the present case, to represent the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it."² He admires Hamlet as a sensitive, cultured, moral man, but feels he was entirely unequal to the task laid upon him.

1. T. S. Eliot: The Sacred Wood, Page 95

2. Wilhelm Meister, Book IV, Page 233

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Hamlet as a sensitive, collected, moral man, but finds he was entirely unequal
to the task laid upon him."

1. F. S. Ellis: The Hamlet, page 92

2. William Hamlet, Book IV page 231

Another of his more pithy remarks on the play is as follows: "The hero is without a plan, but the play is full of plan."¹ Had Goethe but developed the latter part of his statement to its logical conclusions, it might have led him to a quite different view of Hamlet and have forced him to agree with the essence of more recent modern theories that Hamlet is primarily a tragedy with all the make-believe and lack of verisimilitude that such a term must imply, and not a psychological thesis.

Most of the opponents of the subjective theories feel that Goethe's ideas were very unfortunate for the history of Hamlet criticism, in that his views were widely accepted because of his illustrious position in the world of literature.

A critic who in the main adopts Goethe's ideas but expounds them much more minutely is A. W. Schlegel, in Lecture XXV (Criticisms on Shakespeare's Tragedies) in his Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature.² He, too, charges Hamlet with inability to act, and makes much more serious indictments. To him Hamlet purposely devises pretexts for delay because he is "naturally inclined to crooked ways," has no firm beliefs in anything, and consequently not in himself. His thorough-going skepticism holds him back from any definite action, and his "crooked" ways further impede his progress. To himself he is a hypocrite. Schlegel differs with Goethe on the plan of the play, since he feels that the less guilty are illogically punished with the guilty, and with the less guilty

1. Wilhelm Meister, Book IV, Page 230

2. A. W. Schlegel: Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature. Lecture XXV, Pages 404-407

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less easily and illogically punished with the guilty, and with the less easily

he apparently does not include Hamlet himself. The play for him has a wrong plan, since it teaches no accurate lesson on the justice of Providence.

It is interesting to note that although Schlegel has discussed Kyd's Spanish Tragedy elsewhere in the same volume in which he criticises Hamlet, he does not allude to any relation between the two.

Perhaps among the earlier subjectivists Coleridge is the most frequently quoted and bears the brunt of the severe criticisms of the opposing school. He has been accused of plagiarism from Schlegel, but denies the charge as Schlegel's lectures were not published until 1809, and Coleridge's in 1806 or 1807¹

It may be noted, first, that Coleridge calls Hamlet a consistent character², in opposition to those who say that from the ingredients of his make-up he could not possibly be consistent. He agrees with Goethe that Hamlet is so weak that he is unable to carry out his duty. In accordance with this theory Coleridge contends that such critics as Dr. Johnson are wrong when they maintain that Hamlet was actually cruel or vicious. According to Coleridge the delay at killing the King when he was at prayer was not an atrocity; it was a mere pretext for procrastination.

Coleridge attributes to Shakespeare a deep knowledge of mental philosophy, now known as psychology, and the inclination to project his own personality into his characters. He takes a character with an excess or lack of a given faculty and then watches what he himself would do under the conditions. Thus Macbeth has an excess of ambition, and Hamlet an aversion to activity. Hamlet's

1. Coleridge: Lectures on Shakespeare, Page 342

2. Coleridge: Shakespeare and Milton, Page 141

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1. Schlegel, lectures on Shakespeare, Page 342

2. Schlegel, Shakespeare and Milton, Page 141

is a mind to which the actual physical world is much less real than his mental or imaginary world. He instinctively seeks mental Odysseys and shrinks from real action. The critic seems to feel that Shakespeare is somewhat didactic in that he is trying to point out that the correct equilibrium between the real and imaginary worlds must be maintained.

This inclination of Shakespeare's "to place himself under given circumstances"¹ is a seed brought to maturity later by Brandes in William Shakespeare: A Critical Study,² where the author attributes many of the thoughts which impede Hamlet's progress to happenings in Shakespeare's own life, which tended to make him skeptical, and even enumerates which circumstances in Shakespeare's life brought which mental reactions in Hamlet's.

In support of the modern historical theory it may be noted here that Coleridge seemed to have an unpleasant suspicion recurring at intervals that something was due to Shakespeare's sources, and he satisfies his conscience on this score³ by remarking that Shakespeare regarded a story "as a mere vehicle for his thoughts" and never followed a story but to enforce some great truth, and later that Shakespeare "never could lack invention to alter or improve a popular narrative." It would seem obvious from a survey of his works and their sources that even though he could, Shakespeare often did not alter a narrative, especially in parts he felt to be sufficiently effective dramatically. To the writer Coleridge seems

1. Coleridge: Lectures on Shakespeare, Page 343

2. Brandes: William Shakespeare: A Critical Study, Chapter XIII

3. Coleridge: Shakespeare and Milton, Page 141

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1. Coleridge: Lectures on Shakespeare, 1840, 1843
2. Bradley: William Shakespeare: A Critical Study, Chapter III
3. Coleridge: Shakespeare and Milton, 1841

more to be quieting his conscience than satisfying his intellect on the subject of source.

Another phase of the internal difficulties theory is that Hamlet was too moral to commit murder. This doctrine, though held by others also, is commonly attributed to Richardson, who expressed such a view as early as 1784 in Essays on Some of Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters.¹ Although Hamlet earnestly desired vengeance at the departure of the Ghost, his own nature, which was inherently gentle and opposed to murder, reasserted itself afterward. It was only when something occurred to reawaken his desire for revenge that he was restless. Thus his indecision and inactivity arose. In the Quarterly Review for 1847 it was suggested that the fact that Hamlet would benefit in a worldly way by his uncle's death, he would in all probability then ascend the throne, made him mistrust himself, and feel that his motives for the murder were not wholly disinterested.

Many other critics subscribe to the internal difficulties theory with slight differences, but hold the main thesis that Hamlet was not fitted for his task and that he was over-developed intellectually and averse to action. Only a few of the most striking features of their theories will be mentioned here, those points, largely, in which there are individual differences.

Hazlitt, widely read as a Shakespearean critic, gives an interesting if rather far-fetched explanation of those cruel moments when Hamlet acts without deliberation. These active moments are, of course, obstacles in the way of the subjectivists' main theory, for they must explain why a man naturally averse to action, or over-refined, could act so rashly at times. The common explanation

1. Richardson: Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters, Pages 69-141

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1. Hamlet's Character. Although Hamlet earnestly desired

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is that these acts are committed on the spur of the moment when thought was not given an opportunity for analysis. Hazlitt's explanation is that a man who is highly refined and a thinker is not bothered by conventions; that is, "The common rules of life sit loose upon him."¹

Professor Dowden² accepts Coleridge's theory with the suggestion that the emotional side of Hamlet has been omitted in the discussion on his character and that this is as important as the intellectual side. He attributes the lack of activity on Hamlet's part to the fact that Hamlet's father was strong willed, and his son not called on to act. Subtle characterization indeed if Shakespeare ever thought of Hamlet's inherited qualities!

Boas³ in Shakespeare and His Predecessors partly excuses Hamlet's weakness by stating that the stars fight against him and by admitting that the circumstances in which Hamlet lived would be apt to develop weakness. He suggests that Hamlet inherited his weakness of character from Gertrude--an interesting idea, that Shakespeare let the laws of heredity enter his conception of character, but discouraging to aspiring dramatists, who may be forced to trace their imaginary characters in all their peculiarities back to imaginary ancestors, before they are free to write a play.

Hamlet's degree of guilt and the matter of poetic justice are points on which the subjectivists hold varying opinions. Richard G. Moulton in Shakespeare As A Dramatic Thinker⁴ maintains that all the evil in the play except the original crime, which really is not in the play at all, can be attributed to Hamlet's

1. Hazlitt: Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, Page 76

2. Dowden: Shakespeare: His Mind and Art, Page 127 and following

3. Boas: Shakespeare and His Predecessors, Page 386

4. See Page 321

is that these notes are commented on the spot of the moment when thought was not
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Professor Newman suggests Coleridge's theory with the suggestion that the
 occasional side of Hamlet has been noticed in the discussion on his character
 and that this is as important as the intellectual side. He attributes the fact
 of activity on Hamlet's part to the fact that Hamlet's father was a strong-willed
 and the son was forced on to act. Hamlet's characterization indeed is character

over thought of Hamlet's intellectual qualities;
 2
 from the Hamlet and the Hamlet is Hamlet's weakness

by stating that the state of mind which he was by himself that the state
 of mind in which Hamlet lived would be apt to develop weakness. He suggests
 that Hamlet inherited his weakness of character from Gertrude--an interesting
 idea, that Gertrude has the law of heredity enter the conception of character,
 but this is not to suggest that Hamlet, who may be forced to face death in-
 stead of character in all their possibilities back to imaginary existence, before
 they are free to write a play.

Hamlet's answer of guilt and the matter of mental torture are points on
 which the subjectivist will surely emphasize. Richard B. Sewall in Hamlet
 in A Hamlet maintains that all the evil in the play except the original
 crime, which really is not in the play at all, can be attributed to Hamlet's

1. Basil's Character of Hamlet's Play, page 25
2. Basil's Character of Hamlet's Play, page 25 and following
3. Basil's Character of Hamlet's Play, page 25
4. See page 25

weakness. The poetic justice of the outcome may be attributed to nemesis or accident, not to Hamlet. That is, the retributive asserts itself through accident. Stopford A. Brooke suggests in Ten More Plays of Shakespeare¹ that there were two courses open to Hamlet, to kill the king or to leave him to fate, and Hamlet did neither. Death was a relief to Hamlet, for it took him from a world for which he was ill fitted. In contrast to this view that death was not an unsatisfactory outcome for Hamlet, Raleigh in his Shakespeare feels that Hamlet suffers for his virtues. Although he held Hamlet to be one who could not "long concentrate on a practical problem,"² still he is not responsible for the catastrophe, and they all suffer out of proportion for their wrongs.

In summary of the critics who hold the subjective theory, it may be seen that they all believed Hamlet to be weak, over-developed mentally, and unfit for the world of action. They differ largely in their belief in the extent of his culpability, Schlegel and Moulton being especially severe, while others feel there are extenuating circumstances in the existing conditions, and that Hamlet, though weak, must not be too severely censured. Fate was against him.

Objections to the Internal Difficulties Theory

There are many objections to the internal difficulties doctrine. First may be mentioned the fact that the sources of the play, Hamlet, are not taken sufficiently into account, or it is taken for granted that Shakespeare completely changed the general tone of the play. These theorists make the incidents of the plot grow out of a character, when Shakespeare must have worked

1. See Page 128 and following

2. Raleigh: Shakespeare, Page 184

in reverse order and superimposed a character on a ready-made plot. An example of this error Robertson¹ brings out when he charges these theorists with maintaining that the mouse trap was just the device a mentally over active but physically underactive man would invent, when the mouse trap was in the plot of the earlier Hamlet plays, before Hamlet had the characteristics of the too intellectual type. Lewis² suggests that Hamlet decides on the playing at madness too quickly for it to be merely part of his procrastination.

Again these theorists get their idea of the man from such of his actions as the assumed madness and the trip to England. These, too, were facts of the plot which were taken over. Then, too, this school finds Hamlet's weakness in the fact that he does not measure up to the blood thirsty ideals of the revenge play hero, yet they take no heed of the relation of some of the characteristics on which they base their arguments, to the revenge play.

Perhaps the soundest objection to the theory is the fact that Hamlet was not always inactive and hesitant. He could act, and did in the matter of Polonius's death and that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The advocates of the melancholia theory have better explained this difficulty as will be seen later.

The objections to the theory that Hamlet was constrained by moral scruples are as follows: He always assumed that he ought to obey the ghost. He continually upbraided himself for not doing so. If Shakespeare had had this idea, he would have betrayed it earlier, for it is not until Act V, Scene II, that Hamlet asks Horatio, "Is't not perfect conscience to quit him with this arm?"

1. Robertson: Hamlet Once More, Chapter V

2. Lewis: The Genesis of Hamlet, Page 7

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The objections to the theory that Hamlet was constrained by moral scruples
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 stantly upbraid himself for not doing so. If Rosencrantz had had the idea
 he would have betrayed it earlier, for it is not until Act V, Scene II that
 Hamlet says Rosencrantz, "I'll not part my conscience to give him this empty

1. Robertson: Hamlet (New York, Chapter V)
2. Lewis: The Genesis of Hamlet, page 7

It may be questioned whether a weak Hamlet, the one of this theory, is not simply a pathetic one; we can hardly be mistaken in terming Hamlet a real tragedy, requiring a truly tragic central figure. It will certainly be found that audiences do not simply pity Hamlet, but respect him, and Shakespeare in Horatio's final words and in Fortinbras's eulogy gave no sign that he considered Hamlet a failure; similar final summaries of character in his other plays have been honest. If this hesitation and delay was the center of Shakespeare's thought, and he considered it the tragic fault of his hero, why did he not give proper emphasis to the fact?

Those points which seem to support this theory most are the soliloquies and the apparently conscious contrast of Laertes and of Fortinbras with Hamlet.

Vining's Theory

Other theories based on internal difficulties and differing to a considerable degree from the earlier critics may be included here. The first is¹ Vining's effeminacy theory, so widely and deservedly condemned. He believes Hamlet to be effeminate because he is inclined to talk too much, has an inordinate fear of death, is impulsive, admires manly qualities, and has a strong distaste for feminine qualities, as he showed in his conversations with his mother and Ophelia. Then he goes on to suggest that Hamlet actually was a woman. He defends his thesis on the grounds that Shakespeare was fond of such disguise, as we can see from As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, and Twelfth Night. The critic reads into the play a passionate love on Hamlet's part for Horatio and a consequent jealous dislike for Ophelia. He tries to

1. Vining: The Mystery of Hamlet, Pages 11-95

It may be questioned whether a weak Hamlet, the one of this theory, is not simply a pathetic one; we can hardly be mistaken in regarding Hamlet as a real tragedy, regarding a truly tragic central figure. It will certainly be found that audiences do not simply pity Hamlet, but respect him, and sympathize in Hamlet's final words and in Fortinbras's victory gave us a sense that no consolation Hamlet a failure; similar final summaries of characters in his other plays have been common. If this meditation and delay was the center of Shakespeare's thought, and he considered it the tragic fault of his hero, why did he not give proper emphasis to the fact?

Those points which seem to support this theory most are the soliloquies and the apparently conscious contrast of Hamlet and of Fortinbras with Ophelia.

Hamlet's Theory

Other theories based on reversed qualifications and referring to a considerable degree from the earlier studies may be included here. The first is Hamlet's oft-quoted theory, so wisely and judiciously commented. He believes Hamlet to be otherwise because he is inclined to talk too much, has an excessive fear of death, is imprudent, admires many qualities, and has a strong dislike for feminine qualities, as he showed in his conversations with his mother and Ophelia. Then he goes on to suggest that Hamlet actually was a woman. He detects his thesis on the grounds that Shakespeare was fond of such devices, as we can see from As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, and Twelfth Night. The critic reads into the play a passionate love on Hamlet's part for Ophelia and a consequent twofold dislike for Ophelia. He tries to

make the disguise plausible by suggesting that Gertrude, discouraged that she bore a daughter just at the time when her husband was at war with Fortinbras, and she feared defeat, reported the child to be a boy and was unable later to tell the truth of the matter.

The absurdity of this theory is manifest. What possible reason could Shakespeare have for keeping the secret from the audience? There could be no object; he would have violated the laws of dramatic theory by leaving the audience unⁿlightened. Men as well as women have all the qualities he enumerates. Vining even goes so far as to say that because Hamlet felt cold when the ghost appeared outdoors, and because he was sensitive to objectionable odors, he was a woman,--an obvious accentuation of unimportant detail.

The friendship between Horatio and Hamlet is similar to other great friendships Shakespeare has portrayed between Antonio and Bassanio, or Romeo and Mercutio. We are given no glimpse of Ophelia and Horatio together to give any motive for Hamlet's jealousy. The play gives no grounds for our believing that Gertrude would feel any necessity for hiding the real sex of her child.

In short Vining has used poor judgment in allotting the correct importance to lines of the play, picking out mere detail, to which the playwright probably did not vouchsafe a second thought, for a prominent place in the interpretation of his mystery. If we already had proof that Shakespeare was eccentric, ambiguous, and a bad dramatist, we might give some weight to Vining's statements.

Bradley's Melancholia Theory

Perhaps most satisfactory of those who support the subjective theory is Professor A. C. Bradley in his Shakespearean Tragedy.¹ His theory is developed

in enough detail to rank with the exposition of Werder's theory in scholarly method and completeness. Professor Bradley, although he does not class himself with Goethe, Schlegel, and Coleridge, must be included in this group, for his view is subjective, simply adding detail and carrying the subjective idea to a more scientific conclusion, possible in the day of a modern critic.

First Professor Bradley takes issue with Goethe. Goethe's Hamlet he holds to be too weak to do what Hamlet did at times actually accomplish. His hero is pathetic, not tragic.

He next takes issue with Schlegel and Coleridge. Their theory he considers the most widely accepted. But even with Dowden's emendations that Hamlet has all culture but that of the active life, the theory is not complete. To be sure Hamlet supports this theory in his soliloquies, but we cannot but feel that the Hamlet of their theory is not as fine as Shakespeare intended him to be.

Bradley then goes on to expound his own theory, which neither idealizes Hamlet at Shakespeare's expense, nor Shakespeare at Hamlet's. Hamlet is a virtuous man, not really responsible for his weakness, and Shakespeare has produced a great figure, at least psychologically, and, Bradley maintains, a tragic figure as well.

Bradley's ideas may be termed the melancholia theory, for he feels that it is this form of insanity which causes Hamlet's reflective tendency and paralyzes him so that he cannot act, for he is unable to believe, in his morbid state of mind, that anything is really worth while. Bradley supports his thesis on the following reasoning: The other characters of the play looked on the normal Hamlet as a man quite capable of acting. Hamlet never doubts what is right and what is wrong, so he is not a mere sceptic. He is a man who is very sensitive morally, and thus might feel so strongly when he found his mother weak and sensuous that the shock would make him abnormal. We have evidence

in enough detail to rank with the suggestion of Kant's theory in regarding
method and organization. Professor Bradley, although he does not share the
view of the Kantian, Schopenhauer, and Coleridge, must be included in this group, for
his view is subjective, simply adding detail and carrying the subjective idea
to a more scientific conclusion, possible in the day of a modern critic.
First Professor Bradley takes issue with Kant. Kant's Kantian he holds
to be too weak to do what Kant did at times actually accomplish. His view
is pessimistic, not tragic.
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Kantian or Schopenhauer's explains, nor Schopenhauer or Kantian. Kantian is a
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it is this form of knowledge which gives Kantian's reflective tendency and
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state of mind, that anything is really worth while. Bradley supports his thesis
on the following reasoning: The other characters of the play looked on the
normal Kantian as a man with the capacity of action. Kantian never doubts what is
right and what is wrong, so he is not a mere sceptic. He is a man who is very
sensitive mentally, and thus might feel so strongly when he found his world
weak and uncertain that the shock would make him abnormal. We have evidence

that Hamlet is of high grade intelligence from his wit and inclination to generalize, but there is no sign that he is a professional philosopher, and even if he were, it is no truism that philosophers are incapable of action; he is plainly a man of general high intelligence and not of a specialized variety.

In detail Bradley applies the melancholia theory to the play. Although Hamlet is ready for action when he talks to the Ghost, within an hour or two thereafter he is already hesitating. His later doubt about the Ghost is merely an excuse for delay. His "to be" soliloquy and that on the "too solid flesh" are manifestations of his habitual disgust at life. When he spares the King at prayer, we see another case of paralysis from melancholia. It may be significant to note here that Bradley admits the reason Hamlet gives is probably the truth, but he attributes the real reason of delay on this occasion to melancholia. Hamlet, Bradley goes on to explain in opposition to Werder, could have killed the King and explained later, for the people loved Hamlet and despised Claudius. Their distaste for Claudius, Bradley does not prove at all satisfactorily from the text. If Hamlet has not time to think, melancholia cannot control him, and so he is his active self. Such was the case when he killed Polonius. Bradley believes that the Ghost was chiding Hamlet when he reappeared, a proof that the son was remiss, as indeed his words would indicate. Werder is over zealous to argue that the Ghost was not displeased, and is not convincing on this point. The Ghost's words are too definite to be mistaken. Hamlet's words that he has the "strength and means" to do it show that he still intends to act and has not yet learned by experience that he will not. Indeed, not understanding his melancholic state, he is rather bewildered as to why he does nothing. When he returns from England, he appears more hopeful, since there are no more soliloquies. Nevertheless he is more or less fatalistic, willing to let fate take its course rather than to do his part. Laertes can

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raise an army; how much more readily could Hamlet! Even in the last scene Hamlet still procrastinates. But in the catastrophe Shakespeare has allowed him to show himself in all his nobility and sweetness, and has even spoken of a future life, as he seldom did in his plays, to show Hamlet's true deserts. Such is the melancholia theory.

There are certainly debatable points in the theory. First, it puts Shakespeare into the category of the psychologist rather than that of the dramatist. Bradley himself says the play might better be understood if one were to read a work on mental diseases. It would seem to be indeed an unsatisfactory drama if the layman has to read a treatise on mental diseases to understand it. And even though Bradley has said that the virtue of the play by no means wholly depends on this subtle creation (Hamlet)¹, the explanation is still not satisfactory, for it would imply that he who did not understand the mental abnormality would have only a superficial understanding of the play. Bradley, living in an age that had produced a Henry James, may well read into the play twentieth century ideas. We have no proof in his plays or in histories of literature that Shakespeare was principally a psychologist. If indeed he were apt enough in mental philosophy to plan out the melancholia in such detail, how could the same man be a poor enough psychologist to depict Ophelia's madness, a purely Elizabethan conception of insanity, and not worked out pathologically with any degree of verisimilitude?

Again it may be maintained that a man subject to fits of melancholia is not strictly sane, and therefore not a truly tragic theme. It is distinctly futile to write about an insane man for any but scientific purposes. Shakespeare

1. Page 91, Bradley: Shakespearean Tragedy

rather an error, how much more really could Hamlet. Even in the last scene Hamlet still procrastitates. But in the catastrophe Shakespeare has allowed him to show himself in all his nobility and greatness, and has even spoken of a future life, as he seldom did in his plays, to show Hamlet's true greatness. Such is the melancholic theory.

There are essentially debatable points in the theory. First, it coins Shakespeare into the category of the psychologist rather than that of the dramatist. Bradley himself says the play might better be understood if one were to read a work on mental diseases. It would seem to be indeed an unsatisfactory device if the lawyer had to read a treatise on mental diseases to understand it. And even though Bradley has said that the virtue of the play by no means wholly depends on this subtle character (Hamlet), the explanation is still not satisfactory. For it would imply that he who did not understand the mental symptoms of Hamlet would have only a superficial understanding of the play. Bradley, sitting in an age that had produced a Henry James, may well read into the play twentieth century ideas. We have no proof in his plays or in histories of literature that Shakespeare was principally a psychologist. It indeed he were not known as a mental physiologist to plan out the melancholia in such detail, how could the same man be a poet enough psychologist to depict Ophelia's entrance, a purely Elizabethan conception of insanity, and not worked out pathologically with any degree of verisimilitude?

Again it may be maintained that a man subjected to fits of melancholia is not actively sane, and therefore not a truly tragic hero. It is difficult to write about an insane man for any but scientific purposes. Shakespeare

could hardly have been so inartistic in the choice of theme. Bradley's explanation that a pathological condition would excite but little if any tragic interest if it were not the condition of a nature distinguished by that speculative genius on which the Schlegel-Coleridge theory lays stress is hardly of sufficient weight to clear up this difficulty.¹ Nor is the explanation that the world in general does not consider a person so diseased as insane any more satisfactory, for the spectator who really understands would have to consider him abnormal, whatever his associates might feel.

Bradley, too, makes little reference to the sources of Hamlet, his only reference being, "The main change made by Shakespeare in the story as represented on the stage lay in a new conception of Hamlet's character, and so of the cause of delay."² He nowhere points out those conceptions Shakespeare did not change.

Adams's Adaptation of the Melancholia Theory

Professor J. Q. Adams in his commentary on Hamlet³ in his edition of the play (1929) adopts the melancholia theory, though he asserts that Shakespeare's main interest lies in the disillusionment of an idealist. Adams takes even a more scientific attitude toward Hamlet's melancholia, analyzing its parts as weariness of life, suicidal impulse, desire for solitude, irritability, and gloomy brooding. He finds the Elizabethans interested in the subject in view

1. Page 127, Bradley: Shakespearean Tragedy

2. Page 90, Bradley: Shakespearean Tragedy

3. J. Q. Adams: Hamlet, Pages 173-334

could hardly have been as realistic in the choice of theme. Bradley's explanation that a pathological condition would exist but still it was tragic interest if it were not the condition of a nature distinguished by that same native genius on which the Schlegel-Schlegel theory lays stress is really of sufficient weight to offset up this difficulty. But is the explanation that the world in general does not consider a person as diseased as I have just now said satisfactory, for the speaker who really understands would have to consider him abnormal, whatever his associates might feel.

Bradley, too, makes little reference to the sources of Hamlet, the only statement being, "The main chance made by Shakespeare in the story of represented as the state in a new conception of Hamlet's character, and so of the cause of being." He speaks of the sources of Hamlet's character as if not changed.

Hamlet's Character in the Melancholic Theory

Professor J. G. Adams in his commentary on Hamlet in his edition of the play (1903) adopts the melancholic theory, though he asserts that Shakespeare's main interest lies in the development of an idealist. Adams takes even a more scientific attitude toward Hamlet's melancholia, analyzing the parts as workings of life, rational impulse, desire for solitude, irritability, and almost everything. He finds the Elizabethan interested in the subject in view

1. Page 127, Bradley: Shakespearean Tragedy

2. Page 128, Bradley: Shakespearean Tragedy

3. J. G. Adams: Hamlet, Pages 125-126

of the fact that A Treatise of Melancholia (1586) by Timothy Bright was well known in Shakespeare's day and recalls Jacques in As You Like It, to whom he might well have added Antonio, as proof of the vogue of the melancholy type. Then Adams proceeds to show that Shakespeare had an accurate knowledge of the workings of melancholia, quoting a number of nineteenth and twentieth century authorities on the disease to support Shakespeare's ideas. Although he warns the reader against reading modern standard of ethics into the play, he himself calls in modern scientific standards, quite ignoring the fact that a writer who dealt with Hamlet in a strictly scientific mood would likely treat Ophelia in the same spirit, and we have yet to hear an alienist quoted to support the verisimilitude of Ophelia's insanity. Again he draws the distinction of Bradley between real insanity and mere melancholia as a truly tragic theme, holding the latter to be in no way unfit for tragic treatment, but it would seem leaving many unconvinced that either pathological subject would be true art.

He then proceeds much as Bradley does, to whom he acknowledges indebtedness. Hamlet, Adams believes, was convinced of the truth of the Ghost's story from the moment he heard it, and all his delay was due to disinclination toward action, a symptom of melancholia. The mouse-trap is but a relief for his over-exerted brain. The excuse for not killing the King at prayer Adams says, "Shakespeare has in advance made ridiculous to us,"¹ but does not show wherein. He feels the ugly sentiment expressed quite unworthy of the normal Hamlet, thus applying modern ethical standards he has warned the reader to avoid. He then traces Hamlet's recovery, which begins after the second appearance of the Ghost, but comes too late to save him. He accents the importance of the contrast

1. Page 274, Adams: Hamlet

of the fact that A. G. S. (1906) by Henry Bright was well known in Shakespeare's day and recalls Thomas in Y. L. 11. 12, to whom he might well have added Antonio, as guest of the melancholy type. Then Adam proceeds to show that Shakespeare had an accurate knowledge of the workings of melancholia, quoting a number of nineteenth and twentieth century authorities on the disease to support Shakespeare's ideas. Although he takes the reader against reading modern standards of ethics into the play, he himself falls in with scientific standards, quite ignoring the fact that a writer who dealt with themes in a scientific scientific mood would likely treat them in the same spirit, and we have not to hunt in allusions quoted to support the veridicality of Shakespeare's imagery. Again he draws the distinction of reality between what is actually and what is imaginatively as a truly tragic theme, holding the latter to be in the way rather for tragic treatment, but it would seem leaving much unmentioned that direct psychological subject would be true art.

He then proceeds much as Bradley does, to show an acknowledged infatuation. He is, I think, however, was convinced of the truth of the Ghost's story from the moment he heard it, and all his delay was due to his hesitation toward action, a struggle of melancholia. The course-true is but a relief for his over-extended brain. The answer for not killing the King as proper Adam says, "Shakespeare has in advance made provision for it," but how not show otherwise. He feels the only sentiment expressed quite unworthy of the normal Hamlet, then applying modern ethical standards he has raised the reader to admit. He then traces Hamlet's tragedy, which begins after the second appearance of the Ghost, but comes too late to save him. He suggests the importance of the contrast

between what a weak man, Laertes, could do and what a great man such as Hamlet leaves undone. Fortinbras, too, affords an important contrast. Fortinbras is of Hamlet's rank; Laertes in Hamlet's situation, and both did more than the better man, Hamlet. It was too great trust in mankind which led to Hamlet's death. That Adams treats Hamlet as though he were a real person is quite clear. He cannot understand how Hamlet could have cared enough for such callous men as Guildenstern and Rosencrantz to hold them his intimate friends. One who wishes to explain thoroughly even such a minor detail, not in the least relevant to an understanding of the play, shows that he is forgetful of the fact that he is not dealing with reality.

Clutton-Brock's Theory

Stoll calls the psychological theory of Clutton-Brock¹ second only to Bradley's on the psychological basis.² It is based on the idea that Hamlet is continually misexpressing himself. The disgust he feels at the whole subject is so great that he shrinks from thinking of it. However, he forces himself to do so, and there results a reflex action. The more he forces himself toward action, the more his unconscious self asserts itself, and he invents excuses. The result then is a constant misexpression of himself, so that the soliloquies are the only manifestations of his real self. This theory is, of course, like other psychological theories, too pathological for an artistic theme, too modern in point of view for Shakespeare to have sustained it, and dramatically unsound, for as Stoll points out, the theory cannot be translated into acting. The actor cannot let the audience see that he is misexpressing and not expressing himself. A real work of art must be clear in its main points.

1. Clutton-Brock: Hamlet, Pages 33-82

2. Stoll: Recent Criticism of Hamlet: Contemporary Review, Volume 17, Page 347

The External Difficulties Theory

Werder's Theory

The chief exponent of the theory of exterior difficulties is Karl Werder.¹ His work is comprehensive, and more convincing than that of most of the subjective critics. Werder's theory, or one very similar, was first presented by Klein in the Berliner Modenspiegel (1846), a translation of which can be found in the Furness edition of Hamlet. Werder states that he was not cognizant of Klein's work. Such editors as Furness, Corson, and Hudson, in his later edition, accept Werder's theory.

External circumstances, according to Werder, keep Hamlet from acting. He could act, but he must not. Were he to kill the King at once, he would not be serving the true end of justice. The people were ignorant of his uncle's crime. Therefore the murder of the King would appear to be due to Hamlet's desire to usurp the crown. Even the Ghost does not tell Hamlet to hasten. When he tells him to seek revenge, he does not stipulate the time or manner. It is, however, rather difficult to agree with Werder in his statement that the Ghost does not chide Hamlet at his second visitation and that the rebuke is merely self-inflicted by Hamlet. The Ghost says:

"This visitation

Is but to whet the almost blunted purpose."

Even if the words of the rebuke are not severe, they would seem to be censorious.

It is Hamlet's duty then to bide his time until he can make his uncle confess, for without his own confession, the crime will not be credited, since there were no witnesses, and it was quite impossible to take the Ghost to court

1. Werder: The Heart of the Hamlet Mystery

as a witness. Werder offers no explanation as to what has become of the elder Hamlet's supporters, but he believes it is to be assumed they are not available as colleagues of the younger Hamlet. Laertes's ability to raise an army is "mere incident" and did not afford ground for one's assuming that Hamlet could have done the same thing.

Werder's original if not very convincing explanation of Hamlet's writing on the tablets at the end of the ghost scene is that it is merely symbolic of the silence he must maintain.

According to Werder, Hamlet is to be praised for restraining himself, where the earlier critics have censured him. It is easy to act in passion, and Hamlet would have liked to do so, but his superior intellect restrained his more bestial rage. He was a man, and so a creature of reason when he was taking the right course of action. His assumed madness is not a hindrance as most of the critics have said, but permits him to speak more freely. His remarks on the "times being out of joint" merely refer to the upset state of affairs in Denmark and not to melancholia, and indeed they were degenerate enough to call forth such a remark. Hamlet in his soliloquy lapses into accusation of himself, because he rebels at not being able to follow his first instincts, but being an intelligent and reasonable person, he does not let this desire for action stir him on to rash action.

The Murder of Gonzago was a tactful device and not an unnecessary delay. A reasonable human being would need more confirmation than the Ghost's statement. There was sufficient opportunity for deception. At the termination of the play, Hamlet could not kill the king immediately, for his uncle had not yet confessed, and the court, therefore, had no proof, and physical restraint might have prevented him from accomplishing his end. Again if he had killed his uncle at prayer, he could not have supplied the court with proof of the

as a witness. Further efforts to explain it as to what was known at the time
of the investigation, but no further is to be expected that any further
information of the person involved. Further's ability to take an oath is

"very limited" and did not afford ground for one's assuming that further would
have done the same thing.

Further's original is not very convincing explanation of further's witness
on the table at the end of the case seems to show it is merely a repetition of
the same as was maintained.

According to further, further is to be praised for maintaining himself, where
the earlier criticism have occurred him. It is easy to see in further, and further
would have liked to do so, but the superior intellect restricted his more detailed

view. He was a man, and so a measure of reason when he was taking the stand
during the trial. His assumed manner is not a hindrance as part of the criticism
have said, but further his is again more freely. His remarks on the "time

before out of joint" merely refer to the mental state of affairs in Germany and
not to international. And these were dangerous enough to call for such
a remark. Further in his testimony passed into accusation of himself, because

he refers to not being able to follow his first instincts, but being an inferior
intellect and responsible person, he does not let this hinder his action with him
on the same action.

The further of Germany was a tactical device and not an unnecessary delay.
A reasonable person being would need confirmation from the other's state-
ment. There was sufficient opportunity for description. At the termination of

the play, further could not kill the King immediately, for his wife had not
yet confessed, and the court, therefore, had no proof, and physical restraint
might have prevented his from accomplishing his end. Again it is not killed

the whole of further, he could not have supplied the court with proof of the

crime, and the reason he gives, that the soul is saved if it is at prayer at the time of its taking off, was an Elizabethan belief. Beaumont and Fletcher, Werder maintains, make use of the idea in The Maid's Tragedy. Although Werder does not mention the fact, it may be noted here that the Ghost had especially accented the matter of his having had no opportunity of confessing and his consequent suffering and torture.

Then comes Hamlet's one mistake, in direct consequence of which he suffers death. In the emotional state in which he finds himself as the result of his conference with his mother, he lets brute passion dominate him, and he kills Polonius by mistake. Even this accident is not wholly unfortunate, according to Werder, for it would have been much worse for his cause had he killed the King before the latter had confessed. He is now discouraged because of his error as can be seen in the soliloquy, "Spur my dull revenge etc.," but the very error is ripening his cause.

Hamlet must not be held as too cruel in the deaths of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. They were in the service of the King, and he was indirectly responsible for their fates. The key to the mystery is that Hamlet ought to do what no one can do. Justice is admirably ~~sexed~~^{settled} in the outcome, for the King dies at the worst possible moment for the salvation of his soul, when his imminent crimes confirm belief in his former. The revenge is just what it should be. The purpose of the Ghost was not to regain the throne, and Hamlet, successful in his main purpose, dies for his one lapse from reasonable conduct.

Werder is perhaps as over eager to make Hamlet ideal as those who support the subjective theories are fearful of belittling Shakespeare by imputing any inconsistencies to him. But his idea that Shakespeare intended Hamlet to be a virtuous man seems indisputable. Horatio says, "Now cracks a noble heart," and Fortinbras's funeral oration is distinctly laudatory. It would not be logical

to contradict the general tone of a work in the last emphatic words to an audience. It might be added that similar conclusions, the one in honor of Brutus at the end of Julius Caesar, for example, are in harmony with the main ideas of the play. To reconcile such an ending in Hamlet with the idea that Shakespeare was purposely showing through Hamlet the evil effects of weakness would be difficult.

Hudson's theory as set forth in his Shakespeare: Life, Art, and Characters¹ is so similar to that of Werder that it is hardly necessary to examine it in detail. He believes that Hamlet must be held to be noble and that his conduct was normal under circumstances which he could not control. One point in the problem of delay Hudson has treated very satisfactorily, and that is the matter of the soliloquies. He believes the critics place far too much emphasis on them. A naturally conscientious man is apt to worry about his duty, and fear he may not be taking the right course. If we are to accept the Werder theory, we are practically compelled to accept this view, and it would seem difficult to contradict that it is sound psychologically; a really conscientious man may well be more apt to rebuke himself for a small defect than an immoral man, for some serious misdemeanor. Thus Hamlet is never satisfied with himself, while Claudius spends little time in self criticism, and even then hopes "all may yet be well."

Werder's theory has bitter opponents. Although he enobles Hamlet, he is charged with belittling Shakespeare by assuming that the dramatist had no subtle reasons for his hero's delay, and that the matter was merely one of external

1. Volume II, Pages 258-312

necessity. Professor Brandes writes that Werder has "a conception of the play¹ which debases its whole idea and belittles its significance." He reiterates Goethe's idea that the play has a plan but Hamlet has not, and that it is Shakespeare and not Hamlet who saves the King for the dramatic catastrophe.

The chief objection to Werder's theory which Brandes and numerous other critics advance is that Hamlet nowhere mentions external difficulties, and that Shakespeare could therefore not have intended them to have weight. The modern historical critics acknowledge this weakness and attribute it either to oversight on his part or to his feeling that the audience was in the main familiar with the Hamlet problem, since they had met it elsewhere.

One frequent argument against the existence of external difficulties is that since Laertes could easily raise supporters against Claudius, Hamlet, who was avowedly well loved, might easily have done so too. His words, "I have the strength and will and means to do it," are usually quoted to show that the external difficulties were nonexistent. When Hamlet finally does attack the King, no one does come to his monarch's aid. Nor does Hamlet talk of bringing the King to public justice; he considers the matter a personal one.

Lewis calls attention to the fact that he did not turn the mouse trap to² advantage and Bradley maintains that the play was to convince himself, not others.³ It has often been pointed out that the assumed madness, far from being an asset to Hamlet, was actually a hindrance, since it made him the center of the interest of the whole court, and consequently he could not act without detection.

1. Brandes: William Shakespeare: A Critical Study, Page 378

2. Lewis: The Genesis of Hamlet, Page 14

3. Bradley: Shakespearean Tragedy, Page 96

1
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It has often been pointed out that the assumed madness, far from being a mere

to Hamlet, was actually a hindrance, since it made him the center of the interest

of the whole court, and consequently he could not act without hesitation.

1. Bradley: *William Shakespeare: A Critical Study*, page 375

2. Lewis: *The Character of Hamlet*, page 14

3. Bradley: *Shakespearean Tragedy*, page 30

It may be maintained further that Werder's conception of revenge is in no sense the revenge of plays of the Hamlet type, namely revenge plays. Their type was blood for blood, and not a nicely awarded justice, properly weighted, and meted out at just the right moment as Werder suggests.

Those who get their definition of tragedy from Aristotle and believe that his own weakness or error must bring the hero to his downfall feel that Werder's Hamlet is too perfect and does not merit his downfall. This criticism seems unjust in view of the fact that Werder has specifically pointed out that he considers the weakness to rest in the attack on Polonius, the unrestrained passion. This point of tragic weakness need not be given too much consideration. Professor Baker asserts that such definite ideas on tragedy as the Aristotelian doctrine probably did not influence Shakespeare.

Two points Werder makes which the historical criticism of Hamlet maintains, and they are closely related to each other. First, he feels that too much accent is placed on the soliloquies as the key to Hamlet's actions, and secondly, he points out that the delay is not as great as it is usually supposed to be, when once we are free of the delay idea derived from the soliloquies. Although Werder himself makes little reference to Shakespeare's sources, the historical critics might easily point out that Shakespeare's Hamlet does in a few months what Belleforest's Hamlet needs years to accomplish. These two points of Werder's are valuable contributions to Hamlet criticism.

Chief Exponents of the Historical Theory

One of the modern exponents of the historical or scientific explanation of

It may be maintained further that Hamlet's conception of revenge is in no sense the revenge of plays of the Greek type, namely revenge plays. Hamlet was blind for blood, and not a highly educated justice, properly weighed, and noted out at just the right moment as Hamlet suggests.

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The mistake Hamlet makes which the historical definition of Hamlet makes, and they are closely related to each other. First, he feels that too much account is placed on the collision as the key to Hamlet's action, and secondly he holds out that the delay is not as great as it is usually supposed to be, when once we are free of the heavy idea derived from the collision. Although Hamlet himself makes little reference to Shakespeare's sources, the historical critic might easily point out that Shakespeare's Hamlet does in a few months what Hamlet's Hamlet needs years to accomplish. These two points of Hamlet's are valuable contributions to Hamlet criticism.

Chief Elements of the Historical Theory

One of the modern exponents of the historical or scientific explanation of

delay in Hamlet is Professor E. E. Stoll, who in his Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study traces the plot of Shakespeare's Hamlet to its sources and shows its points of similarity to other revenge plays. Another exponent of the theory, Charlton M. Lewis, in The Genesis of Hamlet, after pointing out wherein the other theories most widely believed are wrong, proceeds to trace the story through its early history, even to reconstructing Kyd's Hamlet in detail. His conclusion is that Hamlet is inconsistent. He cannot believe that Hamlet is to blame for any irresolute action. The causes of delay are the external differences which have vanished. J. M. Robertson in his Hamlet Once More, written as an argument against Clutton-Brock's psychological theory, also points out the inconsistency between the action of the old plot and the Elizabethan atmosphere superimposed by Shakespeare.

Bradby in his The Problems of Hamlet¹ first analyzes Hamlet's character, pointing out that he was melancholy, naturally sensitive, and "a critic of life rather than a man of action."² That is, he accepts in part the subjective theory. He grants that there are external difficulties, too, in killing the King, for the latter was kind to Hamlet, and the young Prince would have to justify himself. But instead of trying to reconcile all discrepancies with this theory as others have done, Bradby frankly admits that his explanation does not take care of one side of Hamlet's character, and to explain that brutal side, he resorts to the historical theory. Shakespeare had two conceptions of Hamlet: his first was of a mediaeval hero; his second, of the more refined, cultured man, and when Shakespeare changed the character, he did not bother to change the plot.

1. Pages 39-60

2. Page 43

Two early critics, it will be seen, held a similar theory to that of the modern historical critics. Their criticism, however, was ignored by the critics of the Romantic Age. The following selection is dated as early as 1736:

"The more I read him, the more I am convinced that as he knew his own particular Talent well, he study'd more to work up great and moving Circumstances to place his chief Characters in, so as to affect our Passions strongly, he apply'd himself more to This than he did to the Means and Methods whereby he brought his Characters into those Circumstances."¹

Halliwell-Phillips said in 1879:

"It may be safely asserted that the simpler explanations are, and the less they are biassed by the subtleties of the philosophical critics, the more likely they are to be in unison with the intentions of the author."²

Exposition of the Historical Theory

Prerequisites

A scientific examination of the problem has several prerequisites: The investigator must have a never wavering conviction that we are dealing with drama, not real life, and at least an elementary knowledge of how a dramatist goes about creative work, and what his aims are likely to be. If one holds such ridiculous ideas of creative literary work as to think that the artist determines such points as the heredity and early life of insignificant characters, and equally absurd things have been said of Hamlet, we must despair of his ever having enough sympathy with an artist, or understanding of artistic problems to be a fair judge in such matters. He is the kind of critic who

1. Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet (1736), Page 55

2. Memoranda on the Tragedy of Hamlet (1879), Page 13

The early criticism, as will be seen, held a similar theory to that of the modern historical critics. Their criticism, however, was limited by the criticism of the scientific age. The following criticism is dated as early as 1785:

"The more I read him, the more I am convinced that as an author he was great. He was well, he thought more to work up great and moving circumstances to place his chief characters in, so as to attract our passions strongly, he applied himself more to this than he did to the beauty and finish whereby he beautified his characters from these circumstances."

William-Edwards said in 1879:

"It may be safely asserted that the simpler suggestions are, and the less they are dressed up by the embellishment of the philosophical critic, the more likely they are to be in unison with the intention of the author."

Propaganda of the Historical School

A scientific examination of the problem has several propagandists. The investigator must have a never wavering conviction that he is dealing with human, not real life, and at least an elementary knowledge of how a dramatist goes about creative work, and what his aims are likely to be. If one holds such ridiculous ideas of creative literary work as to think that the artist determines each point as the bareness and early life of insignificant characters, and equally absurd things have been said of Hamlet, we must despair of his ever having enough sympathy with an artist, or understanding of artistic problems to be a fair judge in such matters. He is the kind of critic who

1. Some remarks on the tragedy of Hamlet (1785), page 15
2. Remarks on the tragedy of Hamlet (1879), page 15

always picks out the lines the dramatist probably wrote without a second thought, and makes the significance of the play hinge on just those lines, because he is so little the creator himself that he cannot see things in their proper proportion. Again it cannot be forgotten that Hamlet was to be acted, to entertain an audience; it was not a treatise on psychology, to be dissected and probed like a philosophy. Much of the inconsistency of the play appears only when it is studied, and not when it is merely acted on the stage. The investigator should also have some knowledge of literary history for comparative purposes, and some acquaintance with the sources of the play.

Shakespeare's Procedure

What then was Shakespeare's procedure in construction which brought about the inconsistencies resulting in the delay problem? It is, first, indisputable that Shakespeare's point of departure was plot. As it has been pointed out before, many critics are in error when they assume Hamlet's deeds grew out of his character. The facts of the plot Shakespeare had first before he had developed the character.

Sources

The Hamlet story is a very old one, going back to the Latin Historia Danica, written by Saxo Grammaticus. Shakespeare's, or at least Kyd's, more immediate source was Belleforest's Histoires Tragiques, parts of which the Furness edition gives in translation. Later this story was made into a play and produced on the stage in 1589. There has been much controversy about the authorship of this play, commonly called the Urhamlet, and were it extant, it might do much to settle the delay problem. Critics, among them Robertson and Lewis, feel that Thomas Kyd was the author of this older Hamlet. The influence of his Spanish Tragedy, too, can readily be detected in Shakespeare's Hamlet. There is in existence also a German version of the play, thought to be derived

from the Urhamlet rather than from Shakespeare's version.

The problem of delay in the earlier Hamlet stories cannot but be of value in determining the same problem in Shakespeare's version. We know that in other dramas Shakespeare has not deviated far from the spirit of his source. Schlicking in his Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays (Page 146) states that Shakespeare changes his plot only in a few cases, and Schelling in Elizabethan Playwrights, (Page 117) that he invented only where it was imperative. An examination of source and play in other cases will readily prove the truth of these statements. It is fairly safe to assume that Hamlet is no exception to the general rule.

In Belleforest's version of the story, the source of all the Hamlet plays, the murder of the elder Hamlet by his brother is generally known. Hamlet feigns madness for a purpose here; namely, to make his uncle believe him incapable of avenging his father's death. Years pass before he has an opportunity for revenge. "Nevertheless I must stay the time, means, and occasion, lest by making over great haste, I be now the cause of mine owne sodaine ruine and overthrow."¹ Hamlet's madness is sheer craft, and very necessary to his safety. He killed the king's counsellor in the same way Polonius was killed, uttering the same words, "A rat, a rat." Finally he burned his uncle's supporters to death and killed the king himself, and the story goes on into the reign of Hamlet. It may be seen that the madness, here, was not a pretence for delaying, and that the difficulties were purely external. The Hamlet of this story is a brutal, medieval figure, who does not hesitate to mutilate the body of the dead counsellor, and burn the courtiers in the uttermost cruelty. He changes the writing in the letter as in the later version, which is certainly not incongruous to his other atrocities.

1. Furness edition of Hamlet, Volume II, Page 99

from the original rather than from Shakespeare's version.

The problem of being in the earlier Hamlet stories cannot but be of value in determining the same problem in Shakespeare's version. To know that in other drama Hamlet's story has not deviated far from the spirit of his source, especially in his Hamlet's version in Shakespeare's version (page 122) makes that Hamlet's version changes the plot only in a few cases, and nothing in Shakespeare's version. (page 11) That he invented only what was imperative, as examination of version and play in other cases will readily prove the truth of these statements. It is fairly safe to assume that Hamlet is an exception to the general rule.

In Shakespeare's version of the story, the action of all the Hamlet plays, the order of the other Hamlets by his brother is generally known. Hamlet's version for a purpose here: namely, to make his whole believe his incapacity of executing his father's desire. Years pass before he has an opportunity for revenge. "Remember I must stay the time, means, and occasion, lost by neglect over great haste, I do not know the cause of mine own negligence and oversight." Hamlet's version is a great effort, and very necessary to his story. He killed the king's counselor in the same way Polonius was killed, uttering the same words, "A rat, a rat." Finally he turned his uncle's suggestion to death and killed the king himself, and the story ends on the stage of Hamlet. It may be seen that the action, here, was not a purpose for delay, and that the difficulties were purely external. The Hamlet of this story is a brutal, material figure, who does not hesitate to mutilate the body of the dead, and even the corpse in the dirtiest manner. He changes the ending in the latter as in the later version, which is certainly not in conformity to his other attitudes.

Striking similarities between Kyd's Spanish Tragedy and Hamlet have often been pointed out.¹ Hiermonimo, the character on which Hamlet was apparently modeled, often chided himself for delayed revenge. Before he acts, he takes the following course of thought: In Act II, Scene 5, lines 104-110 he dedicates himself to revenge as Hamlet does in Act I, Scene V, lines 92-111, yet he does not act upon Bellimperia's information in the letter, very obviously authentic, any more than Hamlet does on the Ghost's disclosures. In Act III, Scene VII, lines 1-17 he is still chiding himself for delay. In Act III, Scene XII, he meditates on the injustices of life, and even thinks to take his own life as Hamlet thinks of suicide. In Act III, Scene XIII, he again spurs himself on toward revenge. In this same act he sees his own son, who appears to rebuke him for his delay, just as the ghost appears to Hamlet in his mother's bed chamber. In Act IV, Scene 1, lines 30-40 he admits his apparent neglect in being influenced by Bellimperia's letter.

"Pardon, O pardon, Bellimperia,

My fear and care in not believing it;

Nor think I thoughtless think upon a mean

To let his death be unreveng'd at full.

And here I vow--so you but give consent,

And will conceal my resolution--

I will ere long determine of their deaths

That causeless thus have murdered my son."

If we examine their possible motives for delay, Hiermonimo had probably fewer reasons than Hamlet. At the outset his anger was perhaps greater, for he had immediate physical proof of murder in his son's strangled body to impel

1. Lewis: *The Genesis of Hamlet*, Page 64. Robertson: *Hamlet Once More*, Page 124.

Brandes: *William Shakespeare: A Critical Study*, Page 345.

Nothing is mentioned in the letter as to whether or not the letter was sent

1

been received. The letter, the character of which was apparently

colored, often called attention to the delay. Before the letter, the letter

The following course of thought: In Act II, Scene 1, lines 104-110 the letter

himself to express as follows: In Act I, Scene 1, lines 10-11, yet he does

not say that the letter's information in the letter, very obviously, however,

any more than himself says on the letter's information. In Act II, Scene VII,

lines 1-10 he is still chiding himself for delay. In Act III, Scene III, he

realizes on the letter's of life, and even then he says his own life as

himself to express as follows. In Act III, Scene III, he says about himself as

himself to express as follows. In Act III, Scene III, he says about himself as

himself to express as follows. In Act III, Scene III, he says about himself as

himself to express as follows. In Act III, Scene III, he says about himself as

being indicated by the letter's letter.

"London, 20th March, 1841."

My dear and true friend, I have received your letter of the 15th.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

If we could only have a letter from you, it would be a great help.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

I am glad to hear that you are well, and I hope you will continue to be so.

him to immediate action, whereas the murder of the elder Hamlet was not immediately apparent. He had a problem which did not require as much delicacy of treatment, for the suspected murderers were not related to him as Hamlet's uncle was to him. Bellimperia's letter was much more tangible evidence than the mere word of a Ghost, more or less flimsy and unsubstantial even in Elizabethan days. Yet Hiernonimo delayed as Hamlet did, without sufficient reason.

¹
Lewis in The Genesis of Hamlet has rather ingeniously reconstructed the events in the Urhamlet, which he attributes to Kyd. He feels that whatever is in both Belleforest and Shakespeare, or Belleforest and the German edition must have been in the Urhamlet. He concludes that Kyd introduced the Ghost and retained the madness, which was not reasonable, for as soon as the murder is secret, the madness becomes a hindrance rather than a help, since it centers the attention of those who are unsuspecting on the strange acting Hamlet. This Hamlet is never in doubt. The King is spared at prayer as he is in Shakespeare's Hamlet. The play as a device for entrapping the King is used, and we have the same kind of death, brought about by the use of the poisoned sword. This Hamlet does not doubt. It is readily seen that Shakespeare made little change in the plot of Kyd's play if we accept Lewis's theory.

²
The German Hamlet, Der Berstrafte Brudermord, is commonly supposed to be derived from the Urhamlet. At least it was derived from some form of the play that antedated the later edition of Hamlet, since Polonius is called by the name Corambis, the name he bears in Shakespeare's first quarto. It is a bare outline of the events of the story, with no elaboration of ideas or tendency to moralize. Hamlet, in this play, says that his difficulties are external. "Hither

1. Lewis: Genesis of Hamlet, Chapter VI

2. Furness: Hamlet, Volume II, Page 139

have I come once more, but cannot attain to my revenge, because the fratricide is surrounded all the time by so many people."¹ The play is coarsened and vulgarized and entirely lacks the touches of genius which make Hamlet lifelike.

The first quarto of Shakespeare's Hamlet is in general tone more like the conventional revenge play than the second quarto is, and the later edition also shows an improvement in diction. Differences between the first and second quartos which are significant to the delay problem are as follows: The much discussed lines, "Is't not perfect conscience to quit him with this arm" (Act V, Scene II, line 67) are entirely omitted, thus showing that they have no significant import as far as plot is concerned and were merely added when Hamlet was further refined in Quarto 2. Both Stoll² and Lewis³ point out this difference and also the fact that Hamlet's remarks to his mother, beginning, "For 'tis the sport to have the engineer hoist with his own petar," (Act III, Scene IV, lines 206-207) seem to indicate that Hamlet was not merely obediently following out his uncle's orders in going to England, but that he had made a plan of his own. This would show him definitely active and not procrastinating. Lewis further points out to support his theory that Hamlet, in Shakespeare's conception, changed character between the first and second quarto, that the "to be" soliloquy (Act III, Scene 1, lines 56-89) of the second quarto shows an agnosticism of which there is no trace in the earlier quarto.

1. Page 139, Volume II, Furness edition of Hamlet

2. Stoll: Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study, Page 45 and following

3. Lewis: The Genesis of Hamlet, Page 20-35

The Spanish Tragedy and Kyd's Hamlet are but examples of the revenge play, a type of drama common enough to Elizabethans, and modeled after the style of Seneca. Schelling in his Elizabethan Playwrights¹ characterizes such plays as holding revenge as a sacred duty, which is urged by supernatural influence. The protagonist is full of doubt, hesitancy, and presentiment. Madness, either real or assumed, is often employed in them. There are night scenes which inspire horror, and ghosts are common in them. The leading character matches intrigue with the intrigue of his opponents, and the play within the play is a very common device. It will readily be seen that Hamlet has most of the foregoing characteristics, and the reason for their popularity is quite clear, since every one is dramatically effective.

Evolution of Hamlet

With the desire to write a play that would be a stage success, and surely a dramatist is perfectly justified in having such an aim, with an old story at hand for a basis, and with a complete knowledge of the traditions of the revenge play, Shakespeare must have proceeded in much the following way.

He began, doubtless, with the selection of those items in the plot which he wished to use, rather than with an elaboration of character, or with the composition of soliloquies. Indeed the first quarto is only half the length of the later one; the first containing but two thousand lines, and the second four thousand. Shakespeare presumably followed Kyd very closely, if Lewis is right, for Kyd showed his notable dramatic sense in the matter of selection from old material and in adding to it. Shakespeare showed his good judgment in retaining

The English and the French are the essence of the French play.

a type of French comedy known to Shakespeare, and noted after the style of

French. Shakespeare in his English comedy such play as

politic comedy as a noted play, which is noted by Shakespeare. The

protagonist is full of doubt, hesitating, and hesitating. He is not a

man, is often employed in them. There are many scenes which inspire horror,

and ghosts are common in them. The leading character makes inquiries with the

interest of the audience, and the play within the play is a very common device.

It will hardly be seen that Shakespeare has one of the finest dramatists,

and the reason for this is that he is not a dramatist, and every one is aware

that he is not.

Definition of English

With the desire to write a play that would be a stage success, and satisfy

a dramatist is perfectly justified in having such an aim, with an aim story as

hard for a dramatist, and with a complete knowledge of the traditions of the theatre

play, Shakespeare must have succeeded in such the following way.

He began, perhaps, with the selection of those plays in which he was

not afraid to use, rather than with an intention of character, or with the

composition of characters. Indeed the first point is only half the truth of

the later one; the first condition is the first condition, and the second one

is the second. Shakespeare generally followed the first condition, it is not

for the second the whole dramatic sense is the matter of selection from his

material and in writing to it. Shakespeare would not have failed in writing

the incidents which had been entirely successful in satisfying the audience. The story of Hamlet certainly held audiences, and it does yet, in spite of the opinions of scholars; consequently there can be no doubt of the dramatic insight of its author. Dr. Johnson said that the particular excellence of the play lay in its variety,¹ and it would be hard to imagine a play more replete with devices bound to attract practically any audience. Shakespeare's intuitive knowledge of the psychology of an audience could not have been in any respect lacking. In fact his very desire for dramatic effects led him into some of the inconsistencies of the plot which led to the problem under discussion.

It has been maintained by several critics, among them Dr. Johnson, Hammer, and much later by Brandes,² that Hamlet's delay is a largely structural problem. Had Hamlet not delayed, there would have been no play, or almost none. Such excellent common sense cannot be passed over lightly; the truth of the statement is self evident; still it can hardly be said to be entirely satisfying. One wants deeper seated reasons. No dramatist could build up a play with merely this excuse for its continuance, and no other adequate motives. In Hamlet we can find more detailed reasons for the delay, without overlooking the fact that in no revenge play would it be possible for the hero to be too hasty, since stage tradition required more than a one act play, and in essence Hamlet is a revenge play.

The first necessary change in Belleforest's material was one of time. Although neither Kyd nor Shakespeare observed the unities closely, the ten years duration of the Belleforest plot would have been impracticable. Thus the delay that is left, one of several months, is not nearly as long as that in the earlier version.

1. Raleigh: Johnson on Shakespeare, Pages 189-196

2. Brandes: William Shakespeare: A Critical Study, Chapter XIV, Page 370

An examination of the plots shows that the Ghost was the next deviation from Belleforest. He was put in as a conventional part of the revenge play; and because a ghost is a very good dramatic material, Shakespeare took him over into his version. Appearing as he did on a very cold night at the stroke of twelve, he is impressive enough to make even a man of rationalistic tendencies shudder now; how much greater must his effect have been on an Elizabethan audience, many of whom actually believed in such apparitions. Kyd, as has been explained, introduced the Ghost and included the madness, thus making the madness wholly inappropriate. Shakespeare did the same, without noticing Kyd's defect, or much more likely noticing it and feeling that he could not afford to sacrifice such valuable stage tricks as either was. Feigned madness is a very effective device on the stage, not to be lightly discarded. Then, too, there was the tradition of the revenge play behind it, and it is not unlikely that Kyd and Shakespeare felt that they were dealing with historic material, which in the main they must not alter. Absolute verisimilitude brought about by sacrificing madness or ghost would be much less desirable than lack of congruity with these two appealing stage institutions.

The madness was obviously feigned, since it was so in their source, Belleforest, and there is nothing to indicate that they changed the matter. Indeed were the madness real, there could not be any reason to debate the delay question, since if we have a case of insanity, we need not question a man's reason for doing anything, and we must deal in terms of pathology rather than those of art. It must be clearly seen that the madness was not a means of pointing out that Hamlet was willing to play with anything in order to avoid action, but taken entirely from source material and so mere plot without any special character significance.

Hamlet after his vow is for some time inactive. This delay between Acts I and II it may be noted is the only one of considerable length. In Belleforest,

as has been shown, he had to wait for years. In the German Hamlet he clearly states that his uncle is so surrounded by guards that he cannot safely make an attack. Werder has shown that after all Hamlet did not delay as long as is commonly supposed. If the soliloquies are disregarded and our attention fixed on other phases of the play, it is not likely that the idea of delay will seem to be the most prominent idea. From source material it would appear that such delay as there is comes from external reasons. Shakespeare's neglect in making the matter clear has been variously explained. Possibly he overlooked his neglect, or thought his audience knew of the external differences from earlier acquaintance with the story. Lewis in The Genesis of Hamlet believes that Shakespeare cared so little for this mere external side and was so absorbed in other parts of his work that he preferred not to make mention of the matter.¹ The Elizabethans, Shakespeare and Kyd, drew the picture of a court which resembled the more civilized court of their own monarch rather than that of a Danish King in the Middle Ages, perhaps because audiences liked familiar surroundings. This, too, made the external difficulties less apparent than the plot required them to be.

The play scene, commonly supposed to be another sign of Hamlet's liking for intellectual effort and his distaste for other activity, another excuse for delay, was not derived from Belleforest. Hamlet's stated reason was that he wished to make sure of something we supposed he was already convinced of. But Hieronimo, as has already been stated, did exactly the same thing, although he had had better evidence than a mere ghost's word. Making assurance doubly sure was a tradition of the revenge play, not without its dramatic purpose.

1. Lewis: The Genesis of Hamlet, Page 91

as has been shown, he had to wait for years. In the German Empire he clearly
stated that his name is as mentioned by people that he asked: what was
in it? Taylor has shown that after all Taylor did not believe in him as in
control. It was a situation and a situation that was a situation that
on other things of the kind, it is not likely that the idea of delay will come
to be the most important thing. Then a word entered in which appears that only
being as there is some time between the two. However, it is not likely that
the matter clear has been seriously considered. Taylor's has developed his
history, as shown by his evidence and of the situation of the situation from Taylor
has been shown with the story. Taylor is the source of Taylor's belief that
Taylor's name is likely for this name entered into and was an attempt to
enter into the name that he preferred not to have Taylor of the matter.
The situation, Taylor's and Taylor, from the history of a name which is
entered the name entered into of Taylor's name entered into that of a
Taylor's name in the Taylor's name, Taylor's name entered into Taylor's
situation. This, too, was the situation of Taylor's name entered into the
that Taylor's name is in.

The name, Taylor's, was entered into the name of Taylor's name
the situation of Taylor's name and the situation of Taylor's name entered into
the name, was not likely Taylor's name. Taylor's name entered into Taylor's
in which a name was entered into Taylor's name entered into Taylor's name entered into
the situation, as has already been stated, Taylor's name entered into Taylor's name entered into
he had Taylor's name entered into Taylor's name entered into Taylor's name entered into
there was a situation of the Taylor's name, Taylor's name entered into Taylor's name entered into

As we have seen, The Spanish Tragedy made use of the play within a play, but for the final catastrophe. In Hamlet the play was used to confirm the audience's suspicions as well as Hamlet's. What could have been more effective than this device already frequent in revenge plays, a device always popular with audiences, and here holding the added dramatic interest of betraying the villain's guilt? The student and critic may feel the superfluity of the play; the real dramatist could not bear to lose so great a drawing card. It seems quite safe to say that the play scene did not grow out of any of Hamlet's qualities of character, save that of all revenge heroes, a love for intrigue and counterplot.

The next act commonly attributed to Hamlet's natural inactivity is the sparing of the King at prayer, which is not in the Belleforest version, but does appear in the German play, and probably in Kyd's play. Whatever the reaction of the sophisticated may be, this scene is on a high emotional height, supplying indisputable dramatic qualities. The suspense must be great to the uninitiated, and suspense is always a valuable quality in drama. If it be remembered that we have as yet no "character," merely a figure who is seeking revenge at any cost, Hamlet's reasons as given in the play are not unreasonable, especially as the playwright has had the Ghost emphasize the fact that he is suffering especially because he died without absolution. If this scene appeared in the German play, where the difficulties were clearly stated to be external, why should it be traced to subtle internal difficulties in Shakespeare's version? It is clearly plot and not characterization.

That this idea of death was a part of Elizabethan religious views cannot be questioned. Any one wishing "an eye for an eye" doubtless could have experienced the desire Hamlet is supposed to have felt.

The Ghost then appears a second time, and in no uncertain words he chides Hamlet, just as the spirit of revenge chided Hiernonimo. Yet this need not necessarily mean that Hamlet's delay was inordinate. The presence of the ghost might easily be desired for stage effect, and the natural thing for him to do would be to press revenge, which would seem long put off to him, who was suffering the most horrible torture. Again we obtain an excellent dramatic situation if we have the departed parent present in spirit with the other parent and their son, the three united, but with such a rift between husband and wife that she is incapable of being aware of his presence.

The killing of Polonius, so often held to be one rare occasion when Hamlet broke his usual habit of inactivity, and so ascribed to certain phases of mental disorders, did not grow out of Hamlet's character at all, but was taken from Belleforest, even to the very words, "A rat, a rat." Neither is Hamlet's uncereemonious way of disposing of Polonius's body strange, nor is the action unworthy of Hamlet; he of Belleforest's version cut up the body and threw it to the swine.

Even the critic who feels compelled to find Shakespeare absolutely flawless, no matter to what lengths he must go to support his aim, must admit that the next steps in the plot of Hamlet are weak. How could Hamlet tell his mother that he must go to England several minutes after Polonius's death? The King tells him later, when Hamlet seems to be surprised. And even though this discrepancy were cleared away, as it is in Lewis's explanation that Hamlet had foreknowledge of the trip and had probably prepared the pirate capture, which finds insufficient proof in the text, certainly the whole matter is very unclear. Robertson,¹ for example, feels that the author from his preknowledge of the play

1. Robertson: Hamlet Once More, Page 168

anticipates this trip and thus confuses the chronological order. Robertson may well ask, as he does, how Hamlet managed the pirates so successfully that they took him back to Denmark. If, then, these weaknesses exist, why may not the omission of mention of the external difficulties be perfectly possible?

Those who attribute this trip to England as a sign of inertia on Hamlet's part are again confusing mere plot with character reaction, for the trip to England was in Belleforest's version, also the murder of his two companions, often held to be inexplicable in a character of Hamlet's nicety. The German Hamlet has an even more flimsy pretext for his getting back to Denmark.

The sword play, in keeping with the intrigue of the revenge play, was not in Belleforest's Hamlet. The righting of the wrong brought about the Shakespearean Hamlet's death, as heroes of revenge plays must die, and Hamlet's death was not necessarily due to his tragic weakness. As has been quoted before, Professor Baker shows that Shakespeare did not construct his earlier tragedies on the theory of a tragic fault, so the unnecessary delay idea need not be retained to satisfy consciences on that score. Horatio's and Fortinbras' lines at the end of the last scene indicate Hamlet to have been a great man who has done his duty. Belleforest takes the same attitude, and so does the German Hamlet, and Kyd looked with favor on Hieronimo. Revenge play heroes were held to be great men, regardless of their cruelties.

Shakespeare took over from the revenge play, too, Hamlet's habit of belittling himself, as little to be taken at its face value, according to Kuno Fisher, as that Faust was a fool because he once so described himself.¹ Nor can one long remain in doubt why revenge heroes stoutly berated themselves, or why a real dramatist should take over the idea. This self reproach gives the

1. Kuno Fisher: Shakespeares Hamlet, Page 265

actor, an excellent opportunity to show passion and rage, and makes his mission seem all the more terrible. It gives an excellent opportunity for acting. The earlier revenge play characters, such as Hiernonimo, merely ranted, but Shakespeare was able to improve on mere bombast, to retain passion and yet refine it as the less skilled artist could not do.

Having taken over his plot and certain revenge play characteristics, Shakespeare could not rest there. He superimposed on the plot a real character, naturally somewhat limited by the facts of the plot, and yet not sufficiently so for entire congruity. The wooden hero became a man under the artist's touch.

Melancholia, a characteristic of the revenge play hero, Shakespeare also retained. Melancholy was doubtless used in its Elizabethan sense, a surplus of one of the four fluids of the body, which influenced disposition. There is no indication that Shakespeare's conception of melancholy was more scientifically correct than his erroneous theory of the fluids. The popularity of the melancholy character may also be seen in Jacques and Antonio. For the playwright the melancholy man is not without his purpose; poetical words of wisdom flow from his lips much more readily than from another man's. For what other purpose is Jacques used? Hamlet, too, in his despondency serves as the means of expression of philosophical poetry, all out of keeping with the cruel hero of Belleforest's story.

Several critics, among them Brandes, have suggested that Hamlet was Shakespeare himself. Brandes even goes so far as to show what misfortunes in Shakespeare's life Hamlet's philosophy arose from.¹ Identifying author's ideas with the utterances of their characters has doubtless been carried to ridiculous

1. Brandes: Shakespeare: A Critical Study, C hapter XIII

actor, an absolute opportunity to show passion and tears, and make his

mission with all the more fervor. It gives an excellent opportunity for

acting. The writer never saw a more perfect actor, and as the scene, which he

played, was able to induce on him, to certain qualities and yet

remain in a free and untroubled manner.

Having taken over his part and certain scenes, the characteristics

Shakespeare never got lost. He distinguished on the whole a real character,

especially as shown by the facts of the plot, and yet not sentimentally so

for poetic dramatic. The writer here found a man under the artist's touch.

Shakespeare, a characteristic of the tragedy that here, Shakespeare also

revealed. He himself was the one who is the Shakespearean sense, a subject

of one of the four kinds of the play, which introduced the action. There is

an indication that Shakespeare's conception of the play was not sentimentally

correct, but his own sense of the thing. The greatness of the play

itself is shown by the fact that he was in London and Antonio. For the play

the technique was as not without his purpose, position of wisdom that

from the first was really that from another man's. For what other purpose

is London really? London, too, in the background, serves as the scene of the

action of the play, and all of which with the great hero of

Shakespeare's play.

Several critics, among them Swinburne, have suggested that Shakespeare

Shakespeare himself. Swinburne even goes so far as to say that Shakespeare is

Shakespeare's life. Swinburne's suggestion is that Shakespeare's life

with the character of the character has been taken to be the same as the

lengths, but it is not unlikely that the richness of Shakespeare's experience in life has somewhat colored Hamlet's lines; nor is it improbable that there can be traced ideas from philosophic doctrines he was familiar with. Everyone is a composite of all he has experienced, and his characters are his brain children. Shakespeare's experiences in life were such that it was impossible for him to create the mere puppet with but one characteristic, brutality, and that was what the facts of his plot required. But this is far from assuming that Shakespeare wrote Hamlet with the main purpose of depicting his own life, or as an outlet for the emotions resulting from his own experiences. Hamlet is still Hamlet, not Shakespeare in disguise, but he is a greater man than he would have been had he been created by an artist of less rich experiences in life.

Although Hamlet was indisputably dedicated to revenge, it is obvious that he looks on revenge, death, and life as a Renaissance hero or as Shakespeare himself might have done, and is, momentarily at least, not the blood thirsty mediaevalist his actions showed him to be. Shakespeare's understanding of character, and compelling genius in portraying real personages was greater than his desire for verisimilitude in plot; and it conquered his plot sense, not only here, but in most of his other plays.

With the touch of an artist Shakespeare further humanized Hamlet. He could not have tolerated the barbarian. He gave him a love of the arts, especially drama. He made him witty and sarcastic. He gave him the little eccentricity of repeating words three times; and finally, thinking of him more as the life-like man he had created than as the mediaeval hero, he changed his hero's age to thirty, to warrant the greater richness of experience that the character suggested, in spite of the fact that this age was incongruous with earlier facts of the play. Lewis¹ feels that this change in Hamlet came with the

1. Lewis: Genesis of Hamlet, Page 21

...but it is not unlikely that the richness of Shakespeare's experience
in life and knowledge of human life; and it is in Shakespeare that we
find the most perfect type of the human mind. Shakespeare is
a composite of all the great minds of his time, and his characters are his
own experiences in life, and that it was impossible for him to
create the more perfect type of character, mentally, and that was
what the facts of his life revealed. But this is the reason why
Shakespeare wrote Hamlet with the same purpose of depicting his own life, or
as he might say, the emotions resulting from his own experiences. Hamlet is
a man, not a philosopher in disguise, but he is a greater man than he
could have been had he been created by an artist of less than Shakespeare's
power.

Although Hamlet was undoubtedly subjected to tragedy, it is certain that
he looks on tragedy, death, and life as a mere passing show, or as Shakespeare
himself might have said, and is, momentarily at least, not the least likely
to be satisfied the action showed him to be. Shakespeare's understanding of
character, and especially Hamlet in portraying that character and feeling
that the feeling for reality is in fact, and is contained in that scene,
not only true, but in most of his other plays.

With the theme of an artist Shakespeare's type of human mind, he
could not have portrayed the character. He gave him a love of the arts,
especially music. He made him witty and sarcastic. He gave him the
characteristics of a great man: a sense of duty, a sense of honor, a sense
of the life-life can be not created from the material world, he created
his own, and in truth, to portray the greater character of Shakespeare's
the character suggested, in spite of the fact that this was impossible with
the nature of the mind. Hamlet feels that the change in feeling came with the

rewriting of the play, which covered so much time that Shakespeare overlooked some of the earlier circumstances of the play, and converted his hero into so sophisticated and cultured a person that people cannot understand his barbarous acts and seek hidden motives, forgetting that the acts were in the play before the real Hamlet was.

Significance of the Soliloquies

An examination of the several soliloquies will reveal their composite elements and make manifest their raison d'être and the consequent incongruities with the plot, in so far as they concern the problem of delay. It has often been pointed out that the soliloquies serve in a similar capacity to the chorus of the Greek play. They give a running commentary on the events of the play. They may, too, serve for variety. Shakespeare always thought of relief in his plays, even to interposing the grave diggers' clownery in stark tragedy. A soliloquy, largely of the nature of philosophic poetry, gave relief from the more dramatic lines, and also threw the latter into relief by contrast. If a dramatist is, like Shakespeare, also a great poet, he will not sacrifice this opportunity for poetic expression of the philosophic variety.

The first soliloquy,¹ that beginning: "O that this too too solid flesh would melt," has its obvious dramatic purpose. It is what is known dramatically as a constructive soliloquy, a device now frowned upon. The constructive soliloquy is used for expository purposes, instead of the confidante or a similar device. Its purpose is to explain the relations between the king and queen, and to set forth Hamlet's reactions to them. It is commonly supposed

1. The references are to the Temple edition of Hamlet. Act I, Scene II, lines 129-158.

revelation of the play, which showed us what the characters were
 some of the earlier characters of the play, and showed us how
 complicated and difficult a person that person cannot understand his position
 and we have other things, especially that the scene was in the play before
 the first scene was.

Character of the Play

An analysis of the several characters will reveal their position
 in the play and will show their relation to the other characters
 in the play. In no way is the character of the play. It has often
 been pointed out that the characters are in a similar position to the other
 of the play. They give a certain commentary on the events of the play.
 They are, too, seen for variety. Shakespeare always shows us what is
 right, even to the point of the play. Shakespeare always is a great writer.
 The play, largely of the nature of religious poetry, was called from the
 name of the first line, and also from the latter into which it is called. It is
 dramatic in the Shakespeare, also a great poet, and will not be called this
 opportunity for poetic expression of the religious variety.

The first soliloquy, that beginning, "O that this too too solid flesh
 would melt," has the same dramatic purpose. It is what is known as a dramatic
 as a dramatic soliloquy. A drama is a drama. The dramatic
 soliloquy is used for dramatic purposes, instead of the dramatic of a
 similar device. The purpose is to explain the relation between the play and
 scene, and to see what the character's reaction is to them. It is commonly supposed

by the supporters of the internal difficulties theories that it serves to show that Hamlet was gripped by suicidal intents even before he knew the worst of the existing conditions, and they consequently prove that he was weak and irresolute inherently. An examination of the soliloquy will show that eight lines deal with melancholy and despair against twenty-two which are purely expository. Weight certainly supports the main purpose of the soliloquy to be informatory on mere matters of plot. To be sure Hamlet expresses disgust with the world. Under the circumstances is it not the natural feeling of any thinking man (we may now use the term thinking man, for Shakespeare has by this stage of the play come to think of the refined character), distaste for a world that gave place to such spectacles? A mere distaste for life is the natural reaction and does not necessarily show that Hamlet is abnormal. Lewis feels that Shakespeare purposely placed this soliloquy, which that critic terms ~~is~~ the only one dealing with suicide, before Hamlet had learned of his father's murder to save him the accusation of being weak, after he knew he should seek revenge.¹ Mere thoughts of suicide seem hardly to require so many apologies. The test of a man is not whether he thinks of suicide, but whether he commits suicide. It is no very subtle psychology nor could it have been beyond Shakespeare's comprehensive ken of human nature to know that many thoughts are in the minds of people not necessarily neurasthenic but to some degree imaginative, which never are fulfilled. The world has always judged them by acts, not by thoughts.

Again, an audience must be impressed by the seriousness of conditions which call for the thoughts of suicide. Such sentiments are just those to be expected of the ranting revenge hero.

1. Lewis: Genesis of Hamlet, Page 105

The second soliloquy¹ deals entirely with consecrating himself to revenge.

The next soliloquy² follows Hamlet's plan to set the mouse trap. Here Hamlet berates himself in the manner of the revenge type hero. He dwells on the comparison between himself and the actor because of his interest in the stage. Thus the lines are a eulogy on good acting rather than a specially significant criticism of himself. The end of the soliloquy is again exposition, giving Hamlet's motives for staging the play. This leaves about one half the soliloquy plainly condemnatory to Hamlet. The question arises whether these few lines together with a few others are of enough weight to cause the critic to set aside all his other evidence. Obviously they are not, in view of the fact that they reecho the selfdenunciation of all revenge play heroes. It is significant, too, that Hamlet accuses himself in general but names no specific time or place of his delinquency. On the other hand he gives specific reasons why the play was valuable; the Ghost might be the devil, who was known to haunt melancholy people.

The "To be or not to be" soliloquy³ has caused more discussion than any of the other soliloquies. To those who hold subjective theories of Hamlet's delay, it is absolute proof of his proclivities to irresolution. Now when Hamlet seems to be getting toward his goal and should be devoting every effort to accomplishment, he stops to talk about suicide. This soliloquy loses any such import when it is understood that in quarto I, it stood in Act II, just after Polonius has told the King that Hamlet is mad from love of Ophelia. Does not the moving of it prove that it is not an important chronological step in the plot? In both

1. Act I, Scene V, Lines 92-112

2. Act II, Scene II, Lines 576-634

3. Act III, Scene I, Lines 56-89

positions it is immediately followed by the "nunnery" scene, and Stoll¹ believes it to have been moved for dramatic purposes, since here Hamlet betrays himself in the lines concerning "all that are married but one shall live," and it is a more fitting time for such a disclosure to take place just before the play scene when the King tries to solve the mystery Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have not succeeded in doing. Certainly we must accept his view that the climatic^c arrangement is better in the second quarto. He also maintains that the soliloquy was needed to fill in the gap before the nunnery scene, and the subject of the soliloquy might have been suggested by his reading. The soliloquy is moved then ~~to~~ because it is connected with the nunnery scene, and not because its actual content is any more relevant in one place than another.

Dr. Johnson and Lewis take the same view that this soliloquy has to do with Hamlet's plans for revenge, and the possible consequences to himself. Lewis² contends that the words "by opposing end them" cannot refer to suicide. Hamlet is now facing his first act of aggression, and he realizes that his own death is a very possible contingency. This view, like others, seems to exist largely to protect Hamlet from the ignominy of contemplating suicide rather than to find sufficient justification.

Even though one does not agree with Stoll that thoughts of suicide were merely derived from Hamlet's reading matter, and that not wishing Hamlet to appear twice with a book as he feared the inference would arise that he was a book worm, Shakespeare failed to have the book in the Prince's hand; nevertheless it is fairly obvious that the lines are mere meditation on suicide in the abstract. Soliloquy, like the Greek chorus, showed a tendency to moralize in the

1. E. E. Stoll: Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study; Changes in Quarto II
2. Lewis: The Genesis of Hamlet, Page 100

possible it is impossible to follow the "mystery" action, and still believe it to have been novel for dramatic purposes, since the latter betrays itself in the lines of the "mystery" and that the latter has one small flaw, and it is a mere fiction, since for such a distance to take place, the only scene when the King came to arrive his mystery, his action, and his intention have not suggested in detail. Certainly we must accept his view that the only arrangement is better in the second scene. He also maintains that the only way was needed to fill in the gap before the mystery scene, and the subject of the mystery scene have been suggested by his reading. The mystery is novel then as because it is connected with the mystery scene, and not because its actual content is any more relevant in one place than another.

Dr. Johnson and Lewis take the same view that this mystery was to be with Lewis's plans for the scene, and the possible consequences to himself. Lewis contains that the words "by opposition and then change" refer to Lewis. Lewis is not taking his first act of opposition, and he realizes that his own death is a very possible consequence. This view, like others, seems to exist largely in the hands of the majority of contemporary writers rather than to find a sufficient foundation.

Even though one does not agree with Lewis that the scene of Lewis were merely derived from Lewis's reading matter, and that was what Lewis to suggest with a book as he feared the intention would arise that he was a book worm, Shakespeare failed to have the book in the Prince's hand, nevertheless it is fairly obvious that the lines are more significant as related to the scene. Certainly, like the Greek history showed a tendency to maintain in the

plays Shakespeare must have been familiar with. Doubtless Shakespeare was here making his own observations on suicide. Stoll¹ again points out the "the oppressor's wrong" and "the proud man's contumely" could not have been suffered by Prince Hamlet. It has often been maintained that the lines on "the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns" are not consistent in a person who believes in ghosts. However it would appear to be the kind of inconsistency of which Shakespeare was often guilty and is quite negligible. The more striking inconsistency of course is that a blood thirsty revenge hero should have such thoughts of suicide at all! Of course the original Hamlet could not have had them. If they need a normal psychological excuse for being, one has not far to seek it. Again we emphasize the fact that almost any meditative man, and Shakespeare now had a refined Hamlet in mind, confronted by discouraging surroundings thinks of suicide as a possible escape, no matter how fleeting the thoughts may be. There is nothing abnormal about them, and they are not necessarily a point in favor of the subjective theory. Shakespeare puts some of his own ideas on suicide into the mouth of his hero, who has now become an Elizabethan gentleman.

2

The soliloquy in preparation for the scene with his mother needs no discussion, it being a mere steeling himself to be firm, and has already been discussed in the scene where his uncle was at prayer.

3

The soliloquy beginning, "How all occasions do inform against me" is in Quarto II and not in Quarto I. This fact precludes its being a vital part of the plot, and the psychological critics have made it so, as they use this as one of their strongest proofs that Hamlet knew himself guilty of procrastination.

1. E. E. Stoll: Hamlet; An Historical and Comparative Study; Changes in Quarto II
2. Act III, Scene II, Lines 406-417
3. Act IV, Scene IV, Lines 32-66

Here again Hamlet is probably too severe on himself in the style of the revenge play hero. Much has been made of the words, "I have the means to do it." This is held to be absolute proof of the lack of existence of external difficulties. If it is, it is not the part of a good dramatist to move his exposition to the fourth act, and Shakespeare has nowhere else been so faulty in dramatic technique. It is, too, as has been shown exactly opposite to what the former Hamlet story would suggest. A much more likely interpretation is that Hamlet was reassuring himself. In spite of difficulties I can do this thing. Much, too, is made of the contrast between Hamlet and Fortinbras. It can readily be seen that the cases were in no sense parallel, and the Fortinbras incident may only tend to glorify Hamlet in that it shows him to be facing single handed a much worse problem. For Hamlet's glory Shakespeare has had him face this problem without assistance from anyone. Not even his mother helps as in former versions of the play. Again the very fact that Hamlet thought of the contrast showed him to be constantly dwelling on his revenge problem, or he would not have been sensitive enough to think of a contrast. In short we have nothing but the somewhat refined and yet theatrical bombast of a revenge hero, very similar to the cruder self denunciation to which Hiernonimo was subject.

This is the last soliloquy of the self denunciation type. Hamlet no longer rebukes himself, doubtless for the reason that the author is too busy with action, making one significant incident follow another in quick succession. Prof. Stoll¹ has pointed out, too, that if this is the turning point in Hamlet's disease of melancholia, it is strange to have the fault remedied before it has brought its evil consequences in the catastrophe.

1. E. E. Stoll: Hamlet; An Historical and Comparative Study; Changes in Quarto II

Those who condemn Hamlet find much to justify their views in his conversation with Horatio after his return to Denmark. "Does it not, thinks't thou, stand me now upon to quit him with this arm?" A doubt at this late moment, they maintain, surely shows a weakness in Hamlet. It is all the more inconsistent coming after his account of the brutal murder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Here Shakespeare is portraying his own Hamlet, the Hamlet of a higher moral plane than the character of the story, for this civilized man needs reassurance to commit any murder.

Professor Thorndike in "The Relation of Hamlet to Revenge Plays"¹ brings out further the significance of these soliloquies as mere revenge play devices by showing that the second and third were probably like those of the first Hamlet, and the fifth and sixth follow the original in subject matter. The seventh is lacking in Quarto I. Thus we have the first and fourth only which are purely Shakespeare's work. Robertson, too, maintains that the fourth or "To be" soliloquy goes back to pre-Shakespearean matter.² Thus even in the soliloquies Shakespeare is merely taking over the subject matter of his predecessors.

Artistic Value of the Play

It must then be concluded that there will always be inconsistencies in Hamlet which cannot be removed by any theory; we can understand their existence, but never explain them away; it does not necessarily follow, however, that the play must be condemned consequently as a work of art.

Certainly any work of art must be judged by the standards of the particular branch of art to which it belongs, and Hamlet is a drama. Dramatically it has

1. Thorndike: Relation of Hamlet to Contemporary Revenge Plays; Modern Language assoc., Volume 17, 1902. Page 171

2. Robertson: Hamlet Once More: Page 137

been a great success. It has held audiences for three hundred years and still does. Plays are intended for production, Lamb to the contrary, and an audience, in merely seeing the play presented, does not notice the inconsistencies. Kuno Fisher in Shakespeare's Hamlet¹ has pointed out its superiority to other revenge plays. The hero is without blame. There is no curse on him. His revenge is his fate rather than his desire. It was a real and deep love for his father which led the hero to seek his revenge. All these differences are steps toward a higher artistic level than earlier revenge plays could possibly have attained.

From mere stereotyped marionettes Shakespeare has created realistic individuals which it is safe to say the world of literature would not willingly sacrifice for the purpose of obtaining entire consistency of plot. Hamlet is so real that almost every student of the play sees himself reflected in the character. He has his weakness as well as his strength, but both are those of real flesh and blood. Claudius, vile as he is, still has the redeeming qualities which make him human.

There can be no better proof of the realistic qualities of the characters perhaps than the fact that so many great critics in discussing them seem to forget they are dealing with the imaginary and speak of the characters as of actual people. This illusion could hardly exist in the case of unconvincing characters.

Nor can it be forgotten that in Hamlet there is some of the most superb dramatic poetry in the English language. Even Mencken though he "moans sourly over the spectacle of generations of pedants debating the question of Hamlet's mental processes" feels that Shakespeare "has employed him as a convenient spout² for some of the finest music ever got into words." More authentic sources of the same sentiment are not lacking.

1. Kuno Fisher: Shakespeare's Hamlet, Page 265

2. H. L. Mencken: The Poet and His Art

Hamlet can safely be ranked with the greatest plays in the English language, if not in any language. It is inconsistent since a sensitive, modern character was injected into a mediaeval plot, and the inconsistency cannot be explained away; but so great are the play's dramatic qualities, so ingenious is the character portrayal, and so sublime the form of expression that it cannot be denied its place among great works of art merely for a lack of verisimilitude in one respect.

Summary

There have been many theories on Hamlet's reasons for delay, for the most part affected by the nationality and personal characteristics of the critics, and by the prominent ideas of his age. These theories have been particularly numerous since the beginning of the Romantic Age, as Elizabethans saw performances of Hamlet instead of studying it as a literary work, and consequently took the play at its face value. Most of these theories have been impressionistic in nature and have disregarded literary history and the principles of dramatic theory; they have also been guilty of anachronisms in the history of human thought. The historical or scientific theory is the best, since it does not disregard these critical essentials and proceeds in a modern scientific manner to examine the play, but is firmly based on the principle that the play, being of the Elizabethan Age, must always remain Elizabethan in substance.

The theory of internal difficulties has been supported by Goethe, Coleridge, Schlegel, and many others. In the main it contends that Hamlet was too sensitive a person, too little fitted for practical life to be able to face the great problem placed upon him. Consequently he was guilty of delay. The critics vary in the amount of censure they mete out to him for this procrastination;

consequently there are many minor variations in the theory, Richardson's being that he had moral scruples against committing murder. More modern theories growing out of these earlier ones are Vining's, that Hamlet was a woman in disguise; Bradley's, that Hamlet was suffering from melancholia; and Clutton-Brock's psychological theory of misexpression. The earlier theories are faulty in disregarding the sources of Hamlet and internal proof in the play by action and inference that Shakespeare did not hold his hero a weakling, and in superimposing the thought of their own age on Hamlet. The later critics make similar errors, especially in attributing modern psychological knowledge to Shakespeare, and would turn the play into a pathological study.

Werder is the chief exponent of the external difficulties theory. He attributes Hamlet's delay to external difficulties which prevented Hamlet from acting. It was his duty to delay until he could work out a plan which would bring about complete poetic justice, and his only mistake came from killing Polonius, or acting too soon, rather than from putting off action. The sources of the play support this theory, but it must be granted that the soliloquies, lack of proof of external difficulties in the play itself, and poetic justice planned by Shakespeare rather than by Hamlet are against it.

The chief exponents of the historical theory are Lewis, Robertson, Stoll, and Brady. They give due consideration to source, literary history, and the principles of dramatic construction. From a study of source material--Belleforest, Der Berstrafte Brudermord, and the Urhamlet by Kyd--they accept Shakespeare's point of departure to have been plot. From a comparative study of Kyd's Spanish Tragedy and other revenge plays they recognize Hamlet as simply a modified revenge play, still retaining many of the characteristics of this type of drama. Shakespeare in his treatment of the old story retained most of the plot material, which was very effective dramatically, and at the same time

developed in Hamlet a personality too fine for the deeds the plot required of him. The soliloquies, too, are largely mere revenge play material, for self-belittlement in soliloquies was one of their characteristics, and some of the material is mere abstract discussion, similar to that of a Greek chorus. The result is a play which can never be consistent; we can merely understand how the inconsistencies arose.

As a work of art Hamlet need not be condemned for this inconsistency. It is far superior to other revenge plays. It still is great art in view of its dramatic power, fine characterization, and sublime verse.

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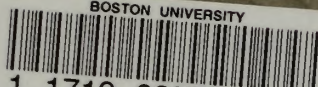
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